DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 198 619 EA 012 958

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TITLE Accessing Power Structures: Some Practical and Successful Approaches.
PUB DATE Mar 80
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Boston, MA, April 7-11, 1980). Some paragraphs may not reproduce clearly due to broken print of original document.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrators: Decision Making: Inservice Education: Legislation: Lobbying: *Policy Formation: *Political Influences: *Political Power: *Power Structure: Seminars
IDENTIFIERS Institute for Educational Leadership DC

ABSTRACT

Five approaches, designed by the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL), help educational administrators gain access to the educational policy-making process. They include a year-long fellowship program, the Educational Policy Fellowship Program, for midcareer administrators to learn about policy-making at the federal, state, and local levels: the Educational Staff Seminar, which brings together educators, lawmakers, and other policy makers: and the Washington Policy Seminar, a program to educate administrators about the processes, personalities, and institutions that shape federal education policy. In addition, IEL offers the Associates Program for state decision makers and is making an effort, through Expanding Opportunities in Educational Research, to provide increased opportunities for minority and women researchers to become involved in policy processes. (Author/WD)

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ACCESSING POWER STRUCTURES: SOME PRACTICAL AND SUCCESSFUL APPROACHES

C. Philip Kearney

Power structures are pervasive facts of life. They operate at all levels, in both public and private sectors, in political, economic, and social spheres. They exert considerable influence on the shape and substance of our individual and collective lives. The simple description of their various forms, locations, memberships, and spheres of influence, would fill a good size volume. The descritption of the various approaches individuals and groups have used to gain access to these same structures would fill a second, third, and perhaps fourth volume.

In this paper, of course, I intend to do neither. What I will do, however, is identify one general type of power structure--namely, the policymaking process in American education; and share some experiences that we at the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) have had in mounting what we believe are very practical and very successful approaches by which individuals and groups can become more meaningfully involved in that process. I hope that this sharing of our experiences will contribute to the

EA 012 958

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symposium and help generate dialogue and discussion.

The Policymaking Process in American Education

That the policymaking process in American education represents an example of a power structure appears self-evident. Educational policymakers--be they at the federal, state, or local levels--make decisions that have significant influence and impact on the lives of children, young people, and adults. For example, a decision by the Congress to provide Federal dollar support for bilingual education is an exercise in power; federal authority and money are used to advance a particular value. Likewise, a decision by a state legislature to require a young person to successfully pass a competency test before being awarded a high school diploma is a clear and straight-forward example of power. And, at the local level, numerous examples of power are conjured up when one contemplates the actions of school boards and school administrators.

Fortunately, the policy process--the power structure of American education--is no longer a tightly-knit, or closed system. Intervention in the policy process is usually wide open to any individual or group who can claim to represent a constituency, who can claim access to specialized information, and who is familiar with the avenues of

access. The problem is not in cracking open the structure but rather in learning how to identify and use the many, many cracks--or avenues of access--that already exist.

Nor is the policy process monolithic, fixed, or static. It is constantly evolving and relentlessly interactive. Nothing is ever finished. There are continual reassessments, re-negotiations, interventions, and changes. Formulation and implementation stages overlap. For example, many of the most important policy decisions are made in the implementation stage. How executive agencies carry out legislative decisions does as much to shape policy as do the original decisions.

Educational policymaking, for us then, is viewed as an evolving, interactive process open to external ideas and influences, involving many individuals and groups, involving all levels of government, and all levels of organization and program administration. Policymakers we define simply as those who participate in the process--be they legislators, legislative staff, executives, executive staff, educators, representatives of interest groups, citizens, parents, students, or the many others who make or influence decisions. It is this range of actors--policymakers writ large--with whom we work. Our mission, out simply, is to help the novice identify and use the many avenues of access to the policy process and provide the veteran opportunities for more meaningful and effective involvement in that process.

Some Practical Approaches

How do we fulfill this mission? In a number of different ways. For our consideration in this symposium, let me identify five particular approaches that we use. For some sixteen years, we have sponsored a fellowship program that provides a year-long opportunity for mid-career people to work and learn under the direction of carefully selected policymakers in education and related agencies at the federal, state, and local levels. For ten years in Washington, D.C., and seven years out in the states, we have sponsored policy seminars that bring together educators, lawmakers, and other key policy actors to interchange ideas and perspectives. Three years ago, we created a new program designed to provide the non-Washingtonian an encounter in depth with the processes, personalities and institutions which shape federal education policy. Together, these three approaches have provided practical and successful avenues for literally hundreds of persons to become more meaningfully involved in the policy processes that govern American education. Let me describe each of these approaches in a bit more detail. Then let me briefly describe how we have applied these same approaches in a focused effort aimed at providing increased opportunities for women and minority researchers to become more involved in helping shape policy for American education.

The Policy Fellowship

Through its Educational Policy Fellowship Program (EPFP), IEL provides a unique work-study experience for outstanding mid-career individuals who have demonstrated leadership and shown interest in improving our educational systems. The Fellowship Program was conceived in 1964 as the Washington Internships in Education to rectify an anomaly in leadership programs: programs at that time were designed to develop educators for specific roles such as principal or superintendent, but there was no vehicle to help these same leaders grasp the larger picture of how policy is made. For educational practitioners to be successful, we maintained that they must have not only a thorough knowledge of their roles, but an effective understanding of and preferably experience with the policy process--with the way that decisions are made and implemented in the larger political arena where education competes for limited resources. Each year since 1964, the Fellowship Program has enabled a selected group of mid-career leaders to build on their previous accomplishment by observing closely and participating actively in the process for a year at the federal, state, or local level.

The Fellowship Program features three main components. Its nucleus is a teacher/monitor component in which key senior-level individuals in public or private agencies act as on-the-job mentors to the Fellows working in their agency. Supplementing this central

relationship is a a classroom component in which Fellows participate in weekly seminars and national conferences where they receive exposure to issues, perspectives, and personalities in education and related fields. No less important to their year as Fellows is a peer-learning and network-building component in which they share their experiences and perceptions with other Fellows at their site and nationally.

Approximately one-fourth of the Fellows spend their year in Washington, D.C., as winners of a highly competitive national recruitment effort. The remaining three-fourths enter the program on an inservice basis, remaining in that agency at one of the eleven Fellowship state sites but with increased responsibilities and training opportunities during their year as Fellows.

Since 1964, some 920 Fellows have shared the EPFP experience. The program has been particularly successful in attracting minorities and women, especially during the past six years. During this time the percentage of minority group members selected as Fellows has been as high as 38, and never lower than 22; women have constituted up to 60 percent of the Fellows. The 920 EPFP Alumni/ae hold an impressive array of policymaking positions in education throughout the country. They know and use the avenues of access. They have become part and parcel of the power structure of American education.

The Policy Seminars

In 1969, Samuel Halperin, the current Director of IEL, became increasingly concerned over what he called the "shared disdain"

between politicians and educators. Educators accused politicians of being blatherskites, compromisers, and opportunists. In turn, politicians saw educators as stuffy, sanctimonious prigs out of touch with reality. Halperin's answer to this condition was to get the combatants together on neutral ground for a realistic, if sometimes heated, exchange of ideas. Thus was born the Educational Staff Seminar--an ongoing forum where all factions within the Washington educational policy community can meet on neutral turf to explore and debate important policy issues. The Seminar, in effect, further opens up the policy process by bringing people and ideas together and serving as a neutral catalyst for reasoned discusssion and intellectual inquiry. For ten years now, it has served as an effective forum where Washington policymakers are provided opportunities: (1) for exposure to a rich array of new ideas and new perspectives; (2) for increasing their knowledge of particular subjects; (3) for meeting professionals from other agencies, departments, and branches in a collegial setting; and (4) for direct contact with practitioners--chief state school officers, state legislators, superintendents, school board members, principals, teachers, parents, and students. Seminar programs--which number better than 80 activities annually--include sessions built around lunch or dinner meetings, one-day site visits, multi-day field trips in the United States, and an occasional two-week overseas study mission.

Partner of the Educational Staff Seminar for Washington policymakers, is The Associates Program (TAP) for state decisionmakers. Established in 1972, TAP now operates seminars in 33 states. Each state seminar is directed by an Associate who conducts five to eight activities annually. The Associates, working as part-time consultants to IEL, are the key persons in the network. Each has to be someone who has access to key policymakers in the state capital, can convene those policymakers, and can establish an informal and neutral setting where policymakers of differing political and educational persuasions can openly explore and debate educational issues of significance to their state.

Topics of discussion and debate vary from broad policy issues like accountability and educational governance to immediate state and local concerns such as the desirability of a state-wide minimal competency testing program.

An additional feature of the seminars is the relative ease with which the practical knowledge and experience gained in one state can be made available to decisionmakers in another state. Through the seminar mechanism, political leaders and educators who have wrestled successfully with policy issues in their home states are called on to share that knowledge and experience with their counterparts in other states. These ties provide policymakers with a wealth of ideas, perspectives, and insights.

In addition to policy issues of state and local concern, the seminars also serve as forums for airing policy issues of federal

and state concern. More and more, the TAP seminars are beginning to serve a federal-state linking or communications function not previously available to educational policymakers. For example, the existing seminar is proving to be an excellent mechanism for placing before state-level decisionmakers for discussion and debate the policy issues central to the implementation of P.L. 94-142, The Education for All Handicapped Children Act.

Across the 33 TAP seminars, more than 175 Seminar activities are recorded each year with regular participation of over 3,000 state political leaders, educators, executive policymakers, and other key actors in the educational policymaking arena.

The IEL Policy Seminars--the Washington-based Educational Staff Seminar and TAP's nation-wide network of state policy seminars--have proven to be unusually effective mechanisms for further opening and enhancing the policy processes that govern American education.

Gaining Access to the Federal Policy Process

In October of 1975, to meet the need of seminar and middle-level officials from the states and localities to learn about the forces that affect federal educational policy, IEL created the Washington Policy Seminar (WPS). Its basic proposition is that, like it or not, we must recognize the significance of the Washington role in educational decisionmaking. The Seminar's mission, thus, is to provide educational decisionmakers from

outside the Washington policy arena with insights and information that will enable them to gain access to and function effectively in the new settings that are developing in Washington.

The "faculty" of the Washington Policy Seminar are the persons who themselves make or influence federal educational policy: Members of Congress and their staffs, ranking decisionmakers from U.S. Executive Branch agencies, officials of the Executive Office of the President, key representatives of interest groups and educational associations, seasoned "Washington watchers," educational journalists, and our own IEL staff. Although a typical Washington Policy Seminar includes nationally-known speakers, the major criterion for their presence is not "name" but the extent to which their abilities and outlooks affect national policy. Equally important is their ability to explain their roles candidly and intelligibly.

A typical Washington Policy Seminar lasts three or four days and draws upon 20 to 30 speakers and resource persons. There are four main elements in the Seminar. The first of these is an overview of educational policymaking in Washington. Veterans of the Washington arena draw multidimensional verbal maps of the issues, institutions, personalities and basic forces comprising the Washington educational policy mix.

The second element covers Executive Branch perspectives. Seminar panels customarily portray how policy is made or executed at the key decisionmaking points within the Executive Branch structure. Top-

ranking officials analyze the policy prerogatives of the President and explain how potential legislative issues are proposed within the Federal Government. Senior Education Department officials outline their roles in the policy process and discuss Federal educational priorities from this vantage point. Middle-level experts and policy-implementors analyze the virtues and flaws, the latitude and the limits of policymaking in the Executive Branch.

The Congressional role comprises the third main element. Members of Congress and senior legislative aides provide a comprehensive look at the dynamics of the Congressional role. These practicing experts analyze the shifting balances of power throughout the federal scene and depict the processes of authorization, appropriation and the new Congressional budgetary functions.

The fourth element covers lobbying in the nation's capital and occupies an important segment of the Seminar. Leaders of such organizations as the National Educational Association, American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO, American Council on Education, the Committee for Full Funding of Education Programs and others of similar stature describe how policy stands are developed and the specific methods employed to attract appropriate support.

Increasing Access for Minorities and Women

As a final example of approaches that IEL is using to provide increased access to and more meaningful involvement in the policy

process, let me briefly describe a current IEL effort to employ three of the approaches described above as vehicles for providing increased opportunities for minority and women researchers to become involved in policy processes. This particular effort, called Expanding Opportunities in Educational Research (EOER), mobilizes three existing IEL programs--EPFP, TAP and WPS-- as vehicles for promoting access for and giving greater visibility to the work of minority and women researchers and thereby providing increased opportunities for them and their work to be used in helping shape policy for American education.

Working with the National Institute of Education and other research-oriented organizations, we have identified and recruited into selected IEL programs women and minority researchers already well-trained in theoretical and applied research skills.

Using the Educational Policy Fellowship Program as the vehicle we have been able to offer year-long fellowships to 18 mid-career women and minority researchers, placing them with senior research mentors in Washington and several states, and providing them with opportunities to engage in educational policy research, access to the systems of policymaking, and a focused training component pointing toward professional advancement.

Using the Washington Policy Seminar program, we provided 76 carefully selected women and minority researchers an intensive five-day orientation to the processes and forces that shape educational policymaking at the federal level. Particular emphasis was given to educational policymaking for research and development.

Using our nationwide TAP network, we have brought 30 or more women and minority educational researchers into closer contact with the policymaking process at the state levels. State decision-makers have benefited from the expertise brought to bear by the women and minority researchers; the researchers, in turn, have benefited through increased recognition and exposure to the policy-making structures at the state level.

These very practical approaches have been effective. They have served literally hundreds of neophytes as avenues of access to the policy systems that govern and control American education; they have provided these same necphytes, as well as hundreds of veteran policymakers, with opportunities to become better informed and gain new perspectives on the issues that confront our educational systems. And, most importantly, they have helped these policymakers escape the narrow confines of their own parochialism.